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THE TWO ENDINGS TO OUR STORY

by *Rabbi Yoni Mandelstam*

One cannot help but question Moshe Rabbeinu's seemingly disrespectful response to Hashem's command that he go and free the Jewish People from Egypt. After years of suffering and turmoil, the time had finally come for the Jewish people to leave a bitter exile, receive the Torah, and return to their homeland. Yet, Moshe protests and questions Hashem's selection. "Who am I to go to Par'oh?" asks Moshe (Shemot 3:11). "They [the Jewish People] will not believe me," Moshe insists (4:1). Moshe also questions his ability to properly communicate with Par'oh in light of the fact that he is "not a man of words" (4:10). The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 3:14) even teaches that Hashem tried to convince Moshe to go down to Egypt for a full seven days until Moshe finally accepted the job. Therefore, we must ask why the great Moshe Rabbeinu was so reluctant to accept Hashem's request. Should his response not have been "Hineini," "here I am," the Avot's response to Hashem's difficult commandments?

The answer to this question can be found hiding in a somewhat ambiguous sentence or two in the Midrashic source known as the Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer. The Torah quotes Moshe as telling Hashem, "Bi Adonai Shelach Na BeYad Tishlach" (Shemot 4:13). Rashi (ad loc. s.v. BeYad Tishlach) quotes opinions from Chazal which explain that Moshe was asking Hashem to send Aharon in his stead. However, Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer (Chapter 39) explains that, "Moshe was requesting that Hashem send Eliyahu HaNavi to free the Jewish people. Hashem then responded that it was time for Moshe Rabbeinu to be sent to Par'oh, and only at a later point in history would Eliyahu be sent to the Jewish people." Rav Dr. Jacob J. Shachter, in the name of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, elaborates on this interpretation of the Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer. He explains that Moshe Rabbeinu fully understood that he would be able to free the Jews from Egypt. Moshe even understood that freeing the Jews from Egypt would lead to the most joyous and significant moments in Jewish history, such as the receiving of the Torah and the

eventual construction of the Beit HaMikdash. However, Moshe Rabbeinu was not satisfied with God's vision, because he knew that the exodus from Egypt would not be the final redemption. Moshe knew that as a freed nation, the Jewish people would experience periods of peace and happiness alternating with periods of severe tragedy and downfall. Moshe Rabbeinu was not interested in beginning the process of a Jewish history which included the destruction of the Batei HaMikdash and long and bitter exiles. Therefore, he requested that Hashem not send him to free the Jews but rather Eliyahu HaNavi. This is because Eliyahu represents the final, permanent redemption. Moshe was telling Hashem that he was happy to free the Jews from Egypt as long as there would be no suffering to follow. In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem for a quick and happy ending to the story of Jewish history.

With Rav Soloveitchik's interpretation of the Pirkei DeRabi Eliezer in mind, we can now understand why Moshe's refusal was not a disrespectful response. In fact, we can understand that Moshe was simply doing his job as the leader of the Jewish people. Specifically, we know that after Cheit HaEigel, Hashem threatened to destroy the Jewish people but Moshe pleaded on our behalf (Shemot 32:11-14). In that instance, Moshe boldly challenged Hashem's decision to wipe out his nation and succeeded in his plea. Seemingly, an integral part of Moshe's leadership position was to beg Hashem to have mercy on the Jewish people. Therefore, Moshe's refusal to take the Jews out of Egypt was only the first of numerous occasions when Moshe would ask Hashem to "change his mind." In Parashat Shemot, Moshe was asking Hashem to skip the entirety of Jewish history and go straight to the happy ending. However, Hashem explained to Moshe that redemption does not come in the form of quick, happy endings. Redemption does not come in the form of fairytales. Rather, a nation must encounter ups and downs in order to properly arrive at true redemption.

While it may seem sad that the Jewish People must encounter great challenges, it is important to note that the Jewish People display their greatest strength when they are challenged. In this week's Parashah, we told that "VeCha'asheir Ye'anu Oto Kein Yirbeh VeChein Yifrotz," meaning that the more the enemy attacked us, the stronger we became (1:12). As the Egyptians hit the Jews, the Jews simply managed to multiply more and more. Although Jews do not live lives similar to those in fairy tales, we

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figure out a way to thrive in exile and multiply despite opposition. The difficult road to redemption forces us to display our inner strength. While Moshe Rabbeinu requested that we experience a quick, happy ending after our redemption from Egypt, Hashem had a different image in mind, the image of bringing out the best in the chosen people in the face of hardship and tragedy.

I would like to share a short story which highlights this unique strength of the Jewish people. I had the unfortunate privilege to attend the funeral of Michael Levin, a fallen IDF soldier who grew up in Pennsylvania. I was a camper at the NCSY Kollel in the summer of 2006, and we were given the option to attend Michael's funeral that Tishah BeAv afternoon. As we got off the bus, we joined thousands of Jews who had made it their business to attend the funeral of a boy they had never met. Rav Moshe Benovitz, the director of the NCSY Kollel, happened to be walking right alongside Rav Mayer Twersky. Rav Benovitz heard Rav Twersky murmur under his breath the following words: "This is the strength of Kelal Yisrael." Rav Twersky, as well as every other person who attended that funeral, was inspired by the sincere unity and strength displayed by Am Yisrael that Tisha BeAv afternoon. May we continue to be strong despite the hardships we encounter. May we have the confidence that Hashem is carrying out His plan for us, which does in fact have a happy ending.

THE ODD CONNECTION

by Avi Roth ('18)

In Parashat Shemot, we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu. Later in Sefer Shemot, we see that Moshe is worthy of leading the Jewish people out of Egypt. One of Moshe's greatest acts that displays his leadership abilities is when he saves a Jew from being beaten by an Egyptian. Moshe was careful to keep the situation under control, as the Pesukim relate, "*VaYifan Koh VaChoh VaYar Ki Ein Ish VaYach Et HaMitzri VaYitmeneihu BaChol,*" "And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand" (Shemot 2:12). The phrase "*VaYar Ki Ein Ish*" appears only one other time Tanach: when Yeshayahu is lamenting over the Jews' sins, we are told, "*VaYar Ki Ein Ish VaYishtomeim Ki Ein Mafgi'a VaTosha Lo Zero'o VeTzidkato Hi Semachat'hu,*" "And He saw that there was no man and was astonished that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it

sustained Him" (Yeshayahu 59:16). It seems odd that the phrase which is used in the context of Moshe saving a life is also used in the context of Yeshayahu lamenting over the Jews' sins. What is the connection between these two seemingly unrelated events?

Perhaps a parable might help us understand the connection between these two disparate events. We can compare Moshe's and Yeshayahu's situations to that of a bank teller. If a teller notices an error with someone's money and nobody knows about it, he has two options: either he can leave his comfort zone, fix the problem, and save the person's account which has been miscalculated, or he can do nothing and put the problem on the bank owner's shoulders.

This idea can relate to Moshe, as he is the "teller" in his situation and only he sees the Jew being beaten. Heroically, he leaves his comfort zone to protect the Jew, despite the fact that his action is a heinous crime in Egypt. He could have easily done nothing and simply let the situation play out on its own.

The same applies to Yeshayahu during his life. The Jews, or "tellers," didn't help each other in times of need, so the "bank owners," or leaders, were left on their own to fix the problems, but they too stood by idly. This idea explains the phrase "*VaYishtomeim Ki Ein Mafgi'a,*" "And he was astonished that there was no intercessor". Nobody was willing to leave his comfort zone to do the right thing and fix the obvious problems, so it was up to Yeshayahu to attend to all the issues.

This has been a recurring problem throughout Jewish history. Many times, Jews have been tempted to follow idolatry or other sins and stay in their comfort zones. Before the generations immediately prior to destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash, no Jew would have even considered leaving Hashem to worship another god, since all the Jews felt and knew that they were responsible for helping each other during difficult times.

May the Jews of the past be an inspiration to us as Jews in modern times so that we will all have the willpower to abandon the short-term temptations of the Yeitzer HaRa and fight for our fellow Jews through all the challenges we face in our lives.

RECONCILING TORAH AND SCIENCE – AN INTRODUCTION – PART ONE

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction

A few years ago, we presented the approach of Dr. Gerald Schroeder to reconcile the apparent contradictions between Torah and science. I find Dr. Schroeder's approach to be most satisfying, since it does not force us to choose between our loyalty to Torah belief in its traditional sense on the one hand, and the respect we accord to many of the findings of science on the other hand.

However, it is vital to clarify and set forth that Dr. Schroeder is not the only voice regarding this issue. In fact, there are, broadly speaking, three distinct approaches to resolving apparent contradictions between Torah and science.

The Three Orthodox Approaches to Reconcile Differences between Torah and Science

Many Orthodox Jews argue that since we know that the Torah is of divine origin, all necessary information regarding Creation is provided by the Torah; therefore, scientific endeavors regarding the origin and development of the world are superfluous and irrelevant. Moreover, this approach argues that science changes with time, as theories that have been accepted for many centuries are commonly disproven, and then the new theories are ultimately rejected as well¹. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yabia Omer 10: Yoreh Dei'ah 24) strongly advocates this approach. Rav Yosef argues that the same approach is to be taken regarding the teachings of Chazal: "We certainly should not deviate from what Chazal established in all of their assertions. This is because the spirit of Hashem informed their words." Rav Yosef cites Teshuvot Rivash (number 347) as a precedent of this far reaching assertion.

On the other hand, some Orthodox Jews accept many scientific theories such as evolution and the Big Bang as extremely well supported and highly unlikely to be disproven. Moreover, these Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah's account of Creation and the current consensus of the scientific community are irreconcilable. This approach argues for a non-literal understanding of BeReishit chapter 1. Rav Natan Slifkin is the most enthusiastic supporter of this approach, which he presents in many of his works, especially *The Challenge of Creation*.

Dr. Schroeder, along with Dr. Nathan Aviezer of Bar Ilan University, is a leading proponent of adopting a middle approach which argues that Torah and modern science are indeed compatible. Dr. Schroeder's primary works are *Genesis and the Big*

Bang and *The Science of God*, and Professor Aviezer's works are *In the Beginning* and *Fossils and Faith*². Each of these books is well worth reading.

We will now proceed to outline the basic arguments of these schools of thought. We will conclude that although this author's strong preference is for Dr. Schroeder's approach, it is very worthwhile to study the writings of each of these schools of thought, and it is recommended for everyone to take into account the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Rav Moshe Meiselman – Approach Number One

Rav Moshe Meiselman has written a most impressive, extensive³ and rich work entitled *Torah, Chazal and Science*. Rav Meiselman is eminently qualified to write such a work, as he is a Torah scholar of the first rank and he has a doctorate in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Rav Meiselman vigorously argues for adopting the approach he presents from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (pg. 693-721), that inquiry regarding the origin of the universe (cosmology) is beyond the legitimate sphere of inquiry of science. Rav Meiselman's approach is summarized⁴ as follows: All unqualified scientific statements of the Talmudic sages were divinely inspired and are therefore immutable. "All of Chazal's (the Talmudic sages') definitive statements are to be taken as absolute fact [even] outside the realm of halakhah (Jewish law)." The flip side of this thesis, and another major theme of the book, is that modern science is transitory and unreliable compared to the divine wisdom of Chazal.

Rav Gil Student⁵ adds that "Rav Meiselman addresses issues such as evolution, the age of the universe and the

contradiction between Chazal's assertions and Copernicus' assertion that the earth revolves around the sun. Rav Student's conclusion regarding the Torah approach to Copernicus is instructive:

"Despite some holdouts, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, most prominent among them, even Chareidi scholars adopted the heliocentric model. Whether it is the force of evidence or long-standing persistence, the Copernican model has prevailed and revelation has been reinterpreted. Today, few would contend that the Bible and Talmud prevent Jews from believing that the Earth revolves around the sun. Rather, we interpret those seemingly problematic passages differently or, aside from those in the Bible, reject their scientific assumptions."

¹Maharal (Netivot Olam Netiv HaTorah, chapter 14) is most celebrated for advancing this argument.

² Professor Aviezer has also helped produce a highly informative and entertaining animated video presenting his ideas, which "stars" Rambam, Darwin, Einstein and an observant teenager. The teenager takes a voyage back to the time of Creation and collaboratively the "stars" reconcile the Torah's account of Creation with modern science. The video is targeted to high school students (in English and Hebrew versions) but may be enjoyed by people of all ages.

³ This book is nearly nine hundred pages long and is jam-packed with rich information and analysis.

⁴ At https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moshe_Meiselman

⁵ Rav Student's review of Rav Meiselman's work appears in "Jewish Action" of the winter of 2014. Rav Student persuasively compares the current Rav Meiselman-Rav Slifkin debate regarding Evolution and Creation to the classic debate concerning the apparent

Sages' knowledge of science. He eloquently presents a conservative approach, denouncing as unacceptable a revisionist reading or a rejection of traditional texts. It includes comprehensive and informed arguments for rejecting science when it conflicts with religion.⁶

Even if one does not adopt every nuance of Rav Meiselman's monumental work, it is worthwhile to glean three fundamentally important points from it. First, it is important to exercise caution in regard to scientific theory. While a wholesale rejection may not be necessary, a wholesale embrace is also unwise. Second, we must be wary of what Rav Meiselman calls a "cavalier allegorization of Torah and Chazal."

The most important lesson to be gleaned from Rav Meiselman's work is the confidence one should have in Torah and Chazal, and that ultimately, however the challenges are resolved, not a single scientific fact disproves Torah or Chazal.

Two important caveats should be made with regard to Rav Meiselman's monumental work. With regard to his presentation of Rav Soloveitchik's views regarding evolution and cosmology, it is important to note that a different approach of Rav Soloveitchik is presented in *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, which was published by MeOtzar HoRav based on Rav Soloveitchik's original lecture notes and the guidance of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, the son-in-law and leading student of Rav Soloveitchik⁷.

The other caveat is with regards to Rav Meiselman's categorical rejection of the position of Rabbeinu Avraham, the son of Rambam, who famously asserts⁸ that Chazal occasionally relied on their contemporary science which was sometimes incorrect. Rav Student documents that this approach is cited as valid by many contemporary mainstream figures such as Rav Yaakov Ariel, Rav Shlomo Aviner, Rav Chaim David HaLevi and Rav Shaul Yisraeli⁹.

Rav Ovadia Yosef (in the aforementioned response) articulates a compromise approach to the position of Rabbeinu Avraham. Rav Yosef argues that although the majority of authorities do not adopt the approach of Rabbeinu Avraham, one who espouses the view of Rabbeinu Avraham (even in our time) should not be dismissed as a heretic.

Conclusion

Next week, we will God willing continue our discussion regarding the reconciliation of Torah and Science by presenting the approaches of Rav Natan Slifkin, Dr. Gerald Schroeder, and Dr. Nathan Aviezer.

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Overall, Rav Student makes some cogent critiques of some of Rav Meiselman's assertions, as does Dr. Aviezer in his review of Rav Meiselman's work, printed in "Hakirah," Volume 17.

⁶ Rav Meiselman, though, does not summarily dismiss science in the manner of Rav Ovadia Yosef in the aforementioned response. For instance, in chapter 22 Rav Meiselman presents a very learned (of both Torah and scientific sources) explanation of Shabbat 107b, where Chazal seem to espouse a belief in spontaneous generation, which the scientific community has virtually unanimously rejected since the late nineteenth century. Rav Meiselman's work genuinely grapples with this and other seeming contradictions and constitutes a significant contribution to Torah literature.

⁷ It is hardly surprising to discover changes in Rav Soloveitchik's thinking. Every student of Rav Soloveitchik knows that he was an exceedingly fluid thinker who would constantly revise his thinking.

⁸ In a letter published in the introductory section of the Ein Ya'akov.

⁹ Rav Michael Taubes relates that Rav Aharon Lichtenstein told a gathering of Yeshivat Har Etzion students that there is nothing objectionable about saying that Chazal based their medical and scientific rulings on the best information available at the time (i.e. the approach of Rabbeinu Avraham). This author similarly heard Rav Lichtenstein say that it is best to avoid killing lice on Shabbat and Yom Tov in light of modern science's rejection of spontaneous generation.

The debate surrounding Rabbeinu Avraham's assertion might hinge on two approaches in Ramban (to Devarim 17:11) to the famous teaching (Sifrei 155, cited by Rashi ad loc. s.v. Yamin USemol) that we must follow Chazal "even if they say that right is left or left is right." Ramban at first explains that this principle is intended to avoid a chaotic situation if the central authority is not accepted (see, for example, the dramatic story of Rabi Yehoshua's argument that Rabban Gamliel erred regarding the date on which he established Rosh Chodesh [Rosh HaShanah 25a]). Subsequently, though, Ramban articulates a second approach, namely that Hashem intervenes and prevents Chazal from making errors.